

**The American Veteran
Edition 1
February 2005**

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>> THE FACE BEHIND THE FILES: ONE OF THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN AVIATORS CHARLES MCGEE TRAINED AS A PILOT IN A SEGREGATED MILITARY DURING WORLD WAR II.

HE AND HIS CLASSMATES BECAME SOME OF THE MOST RESPECTED FLYERS IN THAT WAR, INSTRUMENTAL IN WINNING THAT WAR AND CHANGING ATTITUDES ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICANS IN COMBAT.

>> THERE WAS A DRAFT TAKING PLACE FOR TRAINING AND AS AN AFRICAN AMERICAN, I WANTED TO DO MY PART TO SUPPORT OUR ALLIES IN EUROPE. THE ARMY WAS GOING TO EXPERIMENT AND ALLOW SOME TRAINING OF -- OF BLACK AVIATORS.

THEY DIDN'T EVEN BELIEVE BLACKS COULD FIGHT, SO I APPLIED FOR THE -- THAT AVIATION TRAINING AND WAS ACCEPTED AND GOT THE CALL TO GO DOWN TO -- IT WAS SOMETHING WE'D ALWAYS SAID, GIVE US THE OPPORTUNITY.

>> IN JULY OF 1941 FIVE NEGROES MADE AVIATION HISTORY.

>> OUR JOB WAS TO STICK WITH BOMBERS CLIMBING ACROSS THE ADRIATIC AND ACROSS YUGOSLAVIA AND INTO GERMANY, BULGARIA, ROMANIA.

>> RESULTS ARE SOON CHECKED AND THE DEADLY ACCURACY OF THESE YOUNG PILOTS CALLS FOR A HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS ALL AROUND.

THE MEN ARE PREPARED TO MEET THE ENEMY.

>> ONCE THEY GOT ON THE BOMB RUN, THEY DIDN'T WAIVER AND WHETHER THE FLAK WAS THERE OR NOT, IT WAS HANG IN THERE TILL BOMBS AWAY AND --

>> THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE FULLY AWARE THAT THERE'S ENEMY FIRE IN AND AROUND YOU, THAT THEY ARE FIRING, IT GETS YOUR ATTENTION.

THE ADRENALINE DOES FLOW A LITTLE FASTER.

>> OUR SQUAD SHOT DOWN THREE AIRCRAFT THAT DAY.

THE AIRMEN DID NOT LOSE A BOMBER TO A GERMAN FIGHTER THAT THEY HAD UNDER ESCORT.

I ENDED UP TOTAL COMBAT MISSIONS OF 136.

MOST OF THE AIRMEN ENDED UP WITH WELL OVER 100 MISSIONS. FIGHTER PILOTS GENERALLY COULD BE BROUGHT OUT OF THE COMBAT ZONE AFTER 50 MISSIONS.

I CAME HOME JUST PAST MID NOVEMBER OF '44 AND THE GROUP WAS ONE DEACTIVATED AS THE WAR ENDED SO I ENDED UP IN -- AS AN INSTRUCTOR.

I EXPERIENCED THE FULL REALM, IF YOU WILL, OF MILITARY AVIATION IN MY CAREER.

>> CHARLES MCGEE WENT ON TO SERVE IN KOREA AND VIETNAM.

BY THE TIME HE RETIRED IN 1973, HE'D FLOWN 409 COMBAT MISSIONS, A RECORD THAT STILL STANDS.

IN ALL, 15,000 MEN AND WOMEN TRAIN AS OFFICERS AND ENLISTED TROOPS AT THE BASE IN WORLD WAR II BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL AFTER THE WAR THAT PRESIDENT TRUMAN ORDERED RACIAL SEGREGATION IN THE MILITARY.

End of transcript.